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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001035

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SUBJECT: TURKISH POLITICAL STAND-OFF TRIGGERS MIXED
REACTIONS

REF: ANKARA 1025 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4(b),
(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Turks across the spectrum agree that early parliamentary elections are the only way out of the current stand-off. That, and PM Erdogan's miscalculation in nominating FM Gul, may be the only things on which they do agree. Many see the May 1 Constitutional Court decision as positive, since it virtually guarantees early elections, while also admitting that it sets an unwieldy precedent. Some expect the military's interference to play to AKP's advantage at the polls, while others predict voters will now be motivated to make their pro-secular voices heard. End Summary.

Sighs of Relief from the Business Community

¶2. (C) Istanbul-based financial analysts and business leaders view early elections as the best outcome, given the alternatives. Turkey's influential business group, TUSIAD, called for early elections in an April 29 statement that also criticized the military's threat to intervene. Consulate Istanbul contacts see the Constitutional Court's decision to annul the April 27 first round of voting as reducing immediate risks. They believe it may prompt a relief rally that could gain back most of this week's 8 percent loss in equities. Analysts caution that AKP must manage the pre-election period carefully to avoid further political tension. Can Paker, head of a leading civil society NGO (TESEV), predicted that AKP would benefit from early elections.

All Quiet on the Military Front

¶3. (C) The Turkish General Staff (TGS) has been silent since dropping its web-based e-bomb on April 27. Contacts are divided over whether the memo was hastily prepared in response to FM Gul's unexpected candidacy or carefully drafted ahead of time to reflect the considered views of Turkey's top brass. Retired Navy officer Yilmaz Aklar, who worked with top TGS generals, shared the view of many that Chief of the General Staff Gen. Buyukanit's April 12 remarks did not send a clear enough message about the kind of candidate required or the military's intentions if AKP presented an inappropriate nominee. Gul as FM was one thing; Gul as president, with his Islamist ideology and head-scarved wife, was quite another. Given TGS concerns that Iran poses a real threat to Turkey, military officials are very

suspicious of both Gul's and Erdogan's foreign policy objectives, Aklar said. An academic with close ties to the military told us that senior TGS officials appear satisfied with the memo's impact, but have been taken aback by public and media criticism -- something the military had not experienced after past interventions. Some speculated that there are divisions even within the military, with more religious officers upset by the April 27 memo. There was no consensus on whether the military has considered how to react if AKP is returned to parliament with the same or greater power following general elections.

Opposition

14. (C) Opposition contacts agree that the focus of the crisis was secularism. Most are widely divided over the merits of the military's bombshell and the Constitutional Court ruling, with CHP believing its own legalistic bluster and other leftists expressing reservations both about AKP and the use of extra-democratic means to influence politics. True Path Party (DYP) member and former minister Mehmet Ali Bayar sees this as a very serious intervention, brought on by PM Erdogan's hubris in nominating FM Gul. Former southeastern MP Hashim Hashimi points out that acting through the media as the military did is undemocratic, but that the parliamentary process has also been flawed. Yakup Kepenek, CHP MP, embittered by Baykal's rule and ready to quit politics altogether, regrets the failure of Turkish democracy. Rogue CHP deputy Esat Cenan, who voted in the first round against Baykal's orders, criticizes both his own party and the military for acting undemocratically. Bulent Tanla and Sinan Yerlikaya, both CHP MPs, see the military's announcement as a natural result of its legal duty to protect

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secularism. Engin Altay, CHP, believes the TGS statement was tougher than the 1971 "coup by memorandum" and praised the spirit behind the massive rallies in Istanbul and Ankara. Opposition contacts agreed on one point, viewing the prospect of a second try at electing a president as a waste of time. They also collectively welcome early elections, although none are prepared; parties are scrambling to forge alliances to see them safely past parliament's ten percent election threshold.

AKP Regroups

15. (C) AKP, since issuing a strong response on April 28 to the military's midnight message, and has kept up the fight. Necdet Pamir, of ASAM thinktank, views AKP's bravado as destabilizing and aimed largely at the military. He predicted the strategy would backfire. AKP contacts stress that standing strong, on a democratic platform, is essential both for AKP's constituents and for managing internal party politics. Erdogan and Gul, along with other AKP deputies, maintain that AKP will continue the presidential election process, scheduling a repeat of the first round of voting for May 6, though they acknowledge in private that it constitutes going through the motions and will lead quickly to early elections. Other AKPers, such as Saban Disli, feel strongly that Turkey must move immediately to a general election, without the interim charade, in order to diffuse tensions. Several of our AKP contacts, including Disli, AKP whip Salih Kapusuz and MP Mehmet Cicek, commented that the US response to date on the stand-off struck them as vague and easily misinterpreted as supporting the opposition and the military; they urged us to make a clear statement. AKP contacts expect the party to come back strong in early elections, gaining sympathy votes and capitalizing on AKP's well-oiled, grass-roots organization.

Intellectuals Mirror Public Concerns

16. (C) Contacts in the intellectual community largely see military interference as distasteful, but government challenges to the military's role as just as troubling. They

echo the chants of the thousands who participated in recent pro-secularism rallies in Ankara and Istanbul: no to sharia and no to military coups. The Ankara-based Human Rights Association condemned the TGS statement as an open interference in democracy, noting that no state institution should presume to be the Republic's sole protector. According to retired Gen. Kuloglu, affiliated with the Global Strategy Institute, AKP efforts to appoint imam hatip (religious school) graduates to important positions throughout government have alarmed the public, making the president's role as final arbiter particularly important. They view the threat of an AKP triumvirate -- president, prime minister and parliament -- as dangerously undemocratic. Kuloglu noted that secularism is more important in "Islamist" countries because you can't have democracy without secularism.

The Way Forward

17. (C) Events continue to move fast. AKP has re-set the presidential election clock to start running on Sunday, May 6, and appears intent on creating at least the appearance of democratic activity. Parliament is in session, considering legislation that includes a draft general election bill with a proposed date of June 24. Their marathon will end on Sunday, unless they somehow manage to scrape together a quorum of 367 MPs. Between now and then, in Turkish politics, anything is possible.

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